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SIPDIS

PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#) [IRPE](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ OUT-OF-COUNTRY VOTING COMMISSION RACING  
AGAINST THE CLOCK

REF: A. DAM 6166

[B](#). DAM 6256

[C](#). DAM 548

[1](#)1. Summary: Members of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) explained details of out-of-country (OCV) voting arrangements for Iraqis in Syria during a December 6 press conference in Damascus. Questions included queries about Syrian-Iraq relations and the IECI's independence. The Canadian Embassy has taken the lead on organizing international election monitors. End summary.

[1](#)2. More than 100 people attended a December 6 press conference by IECI to elaborate on OCV arrangements (outlined in refs a & b). According to the panel:

-- An 11th voting center, to be located in Aleppo, was added to the list of ten others in Damascus.

-- There are 144,000 ballots allotted for Syria, although the IECI has no idea of how many Iraqis will participate in the December 13-15 voting. (Note: In the OCV elections held in Syria this past January, fewer than 15,000 Iraqis voted, as reported in ref c.)

-- The SARG is providing security for the IECI office in Damascus and for voting centers on election days.

-- The SARG authorized the IECI's public campaign to encourage Iraqis to vote. (Note: Posters have gone up around Damascus in the last two days.)

-- IECI officials are explaining registration and voting procedures to Iraqi citizens in predominately Iraqi neighborhoods in Damascus.

-- Media and international observers will be present at voting centers.

[1](#)3. During the question-and-answer session, the British editor of Syria Today magazine asked how Iraqi officials in Baghdad could accuse Syria of interference in Iraq when the SARG was cooperating with IECI officials on election planning. Panel participants shrugged off the question, responding that they had full cooperation from the SARG on issues of concern. Another question raised the issue of the IECI's independence, given that IECI officials described their organization as a "daughter" of Iraq's government. (Note: The non-partisan International Organization for Migration organized out-of-country voting in January 2005.)

[1](#)4. After the press conference, an IECI press officer frantically pressed the handful of western diplomats present to volunteer for monitoring duties by December 8. (Note: While expressing his dismay over the lack of volunteers, the IECI official noted he had only reached out to some diplomatic missions in late November.) The Canadian Embassy has hired consultant Hannah Roberts to serve as country coordinator for international election monitors. Roberts promised to provide the IECI a list of volunteers by COB December 8.

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